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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (08/10): As Fatah Congress Draws to a Close, Votes are Cast for Leadership Committees

Main Stories:

News from the Sixth Fatah Party Congress in the West Bank city of Bethlehem continues to receive prominent coverage in the local press. Reports highlight news that elections for the Fatah Central Committee and Revolutionary Council were held on August 9, with results expected today. The reports also note that the elections were very competitive and conducted in a professional manner. All dailies include photos of Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas casting his ballot.

All front pages highlight Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak criticizing the Congress and the statements made by participating Fatah leaders. Al-Quds quotes Barak saying that the "Fatah statements are grave and unacceptable for Israel." Al-Hayat Al-Jadida quotes Barak saying that the "Fatah conference is a disappointment." According to coverage, Barak also noted that the "Middle East problems will not be resolved with a conference but rather with a broad and a comprehensive agreement."

Al-Quds front pages news on Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's remarks during an interview with CNN on August 9 that she hopes to see all Middle East parties take steps that will increase the likelihood of achieving a two state solution.

All dailies run news on the First National Palestinian Entrepreneurship Conference held in Ramallah on August 9. In his opening remarks, PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad reiterated that the international community must be committed to ending the Israeli occupation and "not beautifying it" and urged them to unite and work towards ending the occupation and achieving an independent

Palestinian state.

Weekend stories:

Sunday: August 9

All dailies front page news that President Abbas was elected head of the Fatah movement by consensus at the Sixth Fatah Party Congress. The conference elected 18 members of the Central Committee by secret ballot, in addition to four members who will be appointed upon a recommendation from President Abbas and the approval of one-third of the new members of the Central Committee and the Revolutionary Council. After his election, Abbas said that "this conference should be a new beginning for the Fatah movement. In the past we had several launches and several setbacks, but we managed always to stand up again and be stronger than before." President Abbas also denounced Hamas actions and noted that "the conference was held despite Hamas attempts to obstruct it."

Al Hayat Al Jadida runs a front page story on the Fatah Party Congress' endorsement of the movement's political platform. A Fatah leader, who spoke under condition of anonymity, said that "the conference approved several main points in the political program, the most important of which was the right of the Palestinian people to resist occupation by all means."

Al Quds front pages news that a five-member delegation from Hamas, headed by Mahmoud Zahhar, was in Cairo to discuss the next round of the Palestinian national dialogue. After the visit to Egypt, the

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delegation will travel to several Arab countries, including Syria. Meanwhile, Khaled Misha'al, the head of Hamas's political bureau in Damascus, reiterated Hamas's interest in achieving Palestinian reconciliation "on the basis of resistance and national fundamentals."

Al Quds and Al Ayyam front page news that settlers continue their attacks in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah. A 50 year old man was reportedly injured yesterday when a group of settlers attacked him.

Saturday, August 8:

All dailies carry front page news on discussions regarding the participation of Fatah leaders residing Gaza in the Fatah Party Congress elections. Several of the movement's members in Gaza registered to be elected to the Central Committee and the Revolutionary Council.

Al Ayyam runs a front page story on Saeb Erekat, Head of the PLO Negotiations Affairs Department, revealing that the US is developing a set of obligations for the Palestinians, Israelis, Arabs, and the Quartet to undertake in order to resume peace talks.

Al Quds and Al Hayat Al Jadida cite reports in Israeli newspaper Haaretz that well-informed Palestinian sources said that under a new plan to achieve peace, the US will require Israel and the Palestinians to solve the question of borders first. The sources, quoted under condition of anonymity, told Haaretz that the "American plan will not offer a detailed solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but rather a position on all final status agreement core issues: borders, Jerusalem, and refugees." The Americans, according to the sources, will present an 18-month time-frame for negotiations, and will demand the two parties resolve the question of borders first, which in their view will lead to resolving the other issues such as settlements and water."

All dailies front page news that several people suffered near-suffocation as a result of tear gas fired by Israeli soldiers against protestors attending the weekly demonstrations against the Israeli security barrier. Meanwhile, the dailies also report that settlers and Israeli soldiers opened fire at anti-settlement demonstrators in the village of Araq Bourin, south of the West Bank city of Nablus. Villages south of Nablus have seen escalating

clashes for the past several months.

BLOCK QUOTES:

1) Al-Quds independent daily runs an editorial under the title, "Peace cannot be attained by hope alone" (08/10): "How does Secretary Clinton want the Palestinians to react in light of the increased Israeli violations including settlement activity, the siege and evictions? Clinton must realize that peace can't be achieved by hopes and wishes, or by ignoring the Israeli violations or pressuring the Palestinians to make more compromises. It will take a solid American and international stance to end the occupation and establish a Palestinian state."

2) Veteran Columnist Samih Shbeib opines in Al-Ayyam independent daily under the headline "What's after the Fatah Conference?" (08/10): "The Fatah conference has been held successfully despite all the doubts and obstacles... but the true success now will be in

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Fatah's capability to face the challenges on the ground and prove its rebirth with a new political program that will unite Fatah as a movement again."

WALLES